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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/22/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [ENRG](#) [EPET](#) [PGOV](#) [IR](#) [RO](#)
SUBJECT: IRAN "CONFISCATES" ROMANIAN OIL RIG IN APPARENT
COMMERCIAL DISPUTE

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Mark Taplin for reasons 1.5(b) and (d)
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11. (SBU) Romanian press reported on August 22 that an Iranian naval vessel reportedly fired upon and then seized the Orizont, a Romanian-owned oilrig in Iranian waters in the Salman field near the Kish islands. The rig, owned by the Romanian firm Grup Servicii Petroliere (Oil Services Group), has a crew of 26 Romanians. (NOTE: Romanian television reports that the crew consists of 20 Romanian and seven Indian nationals.) The matter appears to relate to a commercial dispute between the Grup Servicii Petroliere (GSP), and its Persian Gulf partners, Dubai-based Oriental Oil Company and state-owned Petroiran Oil Company.

12. (SBU) Subsequent reports painted a less alarming picture. Presidential Advisor Adriana Saftoiu was quoted on Realitatea TV as saying that the vessel was seized by the Iranian Coast Guard based on a court order issued on August 17. Other press reports quoted Romania's Charge d'Affaires in Tehran, Mircea Has, as saying that the Romanian workers on the rig were unharmed, but were being held under arms on the rig by the Iranian military. MFA officials told Poloff that the matter is being handled by Charge Has for the moment. Romanian Defense Minister Teodor Atanasiu deferred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stating that there was no need to convene a meeting of the Supreme Defense Council (CSAT), as called for by opposition leader Mircea Geoana, before all the facts were in.

13. (C) In an subsequent telcon on August 22 with Charge, National Security Advisor Sergiu Medar said the incident was "nothing much more than a commercial dispute between two companies." Iranian authorities, he said, had only intervened to deliver a legal order confiscating the platform. "It was not a hostile act," he stressed. He characterized press reports as being "exaggerated." He confirmed that the crew had been freed, and reported that the crewmembers had been well-treated. To underscore that the GOR was not treating the matter as an emergency, MFA contacts told PolOff that an interagency meeting had been scheduled for normal working hours on August 23.

14. (SBU) While facts remain unclear, it appears that Iranian officials took action against the rig to prevent GSP from removing it to international waters, as it had recently done with a second rig. State-owned Petroiran filed a criminal case in a Tehran court on August 14, charging GSP with "hijacking" another oilrig, the Fortuna. GSP President

Gabriel Comanescu stated that the rig had been removed for maintenance with the permission of Iranian authorities. GSP is controlled by controversial Romanian businessman Sorin Ovidiu Vantu, who also owns Realitatea TV. The company took over operation of the rigs from OMV-owned Petrom in 2005.

Taplin